DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 086 562 SO 005 907

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TITLE Social Organization, Socialization and Cultural Mediation in Formal Learning Situations.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 19p.; Presented at the Symposium Anthropological Perspectives of Educational Phenoema, AAAS Meetings, December 26, Washington D.C.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Anthropology; *Behavior Patterns; Conceptual Schemes; *Cultural Context; *Educational Anthropology; Educational Research; Field Studies; Generation Gap; *High Schools; Inductive Methods; Nonformal Education; Secondary School Students; Secondary School Teachers; *Social Structure; Student Behavior; Teacher Behavior

ABSTRACT

It is the intent of this research program to provide a comparative base of social relationship patterns out of which will grow preliminary generalizations about the regularities of behavior which characterize the high school and to make the base available to educatidn decision-makers. While educational research focuses on the student as learner and the adult as organizer, this project describes the social organization to which both contribute and assumes that a school is a social system in which members share a common culture. Field research is being done in three New York area high schools, urban, suburban, and rural, by anthropological teams living in the community and participating in the school who are compiling ethnographic records and are meeting to compare data and to establish an analytic framework for that comparison based on categories native to the data. By the end of the first phase of this research ethnographic records are expected to be completed and a conceptual framework and working methodology established, leading to a preliminary description of basic social behavioral structures in American high schools. (JH)

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SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, SOCIALIZATION AND CULTURAL MEDIATION IN FORMAL LEARNING SITUATIONS

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SP 005 907

Presented at the Symposium Anthropological Perspectives of Educational Phenomena, AAAS Meetings, December 26, Washington D.C.

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A number of recent social commentators on education have rediscovered the lonely crowd in the corridors of American schools. Whether they comment on future shock, reconsideration of individualism and freedom, or deal more directly with growing alienation of students and teachers from schools, each indicts education for its failure to provide continuity and congruence between the values and knowledge of succeeding generations in educational settings. Nowhere in education is this failure more obvious and more critical than in the discrepancy between the curriculum and organization of the high school and the culture and interests of students and teachers.

Despite increasing evidence that more socialization and probably more learning takes place in peer-mediated group oriented social systems in the high school, we know little about the optimum organization to facilitate such learning and nothing about how such systems intersect with the formal organization of the school. In large measure this results from the fact that studies in education have tended to focus on the individual as learner. But we have also failed to look at the social organization of education as a natural setting for learning because most organizational theory and methodology in education comes from a concern with administration and management and so intersects with the literature on formal organizational analysis.

And so, while learning studies focus on students, organizational studies focus on the adults. Because of

these problems of method and orientation, most organizational descriptions of schools are presented in a formal organization framework which explains something of how education resembles the bureaucratic structures of business and government, but virtually nothing about how it is organized to facilitate the learner's interface with the organization. We now have very little reliable knowledge about the optimum organization to facilitate learning or of how these facilitative, extra-organizational learning systems intersect with the formal organization of the school. As a result, schoolmen tend to question the fit between the formal analytic models displayed by educational researchers and the social reality of their own schools. What is operationally more important, they can't see how they can get from their "here" to the organizational analyst's "there." And many are not certain they would want to make that trip.

Yet, we need only to look at current trends in education--emphasis on affective and humanistic education, behavior modification, encounter and sensitivity programs, open classrooms and greater peer group reference and governance--to realize that educators are beginning to sense that informal social systems may be the primary facilitators of learning. Many of these educators, however, are proposing the adoption of these new programs and structures in somewhat of a conceptual vacuum. Specifically they sense in a basic emotional "gut-reaction" way, that informal systems are important, but they do not possess a clear and comprehensive understanding of what it is that makes the informal social network so critical

to learning, and how these informal systems operate. As they attempt to develop new programs aimed at reducing the descrepancy between the environment of the school and the student culture they are frustrated because we seem compelled to take these new programs and somehow force them into the formal organizational structure of the school and, of course, the structure eventually corrupts the function. It is at this point, we think, that anthropological field research techniques can be most useful because they need not assume any pre-existing structure and can be the means for generating the data for a reconnection between learning environments and social structure in education. This is, we think, one of the major reasons for the growing movement to apply the techniques and conceptual methods of anthropology to educational research. Hopefully, this new look may provide better data on how the schools actually function, as well as serving as a tool for developing models for organizational change in educational systems that earlier methods could not provide. Educational encounters, whether these occur in formal or informal settings, tend not to repeat laboratory models - if indeed they will submit, in some of their respects, to satisfactory models at all. They are moments of action and response, fluid and sometimes non-verbal. And, although their caprice can be overstated, the events of teaching and learning do manage to trouble even the most precise, comprehensive research strategies, as any educator who has attempted classroom observation will attest.

Nonetheless, conventional research and evaluation procedures in education continue to exploit arbitrary environments, statistical measures, and "problems" in seeking (often basic) information about what goes on in educational encounters and in building knowledge of educational processes and structures. Anthropology does offer a considerable expertise to traditional educational research in this regard. One distinction of anthropological inquiry is that it describes "natural" environments and ground-level behavior. The descriptive activity of anthropology should concern what people are observed to do, not simply what people say they are doing or what they claim ought to be done. Much educational research (and particularly evaluation - formative or summative) suffers the confusion of actual behavior and normative behavior. In a sense the problem of relevance in contemporary American public schooling is, in fact, a failure on the part of schoolmen to recognize the inconsistencies, contradictions, and paradoxes youth confront in trying to make sense of differenses between actual and normative behavior. Further, the disposition of traditional educational research to generalize, and attempt application of, findings from the study of arbitrary environments and normative behavior to "natural" environments of "real" behavior is much less a tendency of the past than contemporary technically impressive research methods and sophisticated analyses of data would have us believe.

But, if the craft of anthropological inquiry applies to educational research, it is also true, however, that a great deal

of the anthropology of education still answers mostly to the profession of anthropology. Many anthropologists whose primary interest is the anthropology of education still have a marked tendency to assess their work as anthropology; they have in their view a prior and fixed commitment to the discipline and to whatever will advance disciplinary interests, theoretical or practical.

All this, one might expect, sustains (at best) a delicate and guarded cooperation between educators and anthropologists in educational research and (at worst) barely submerged antagonisms between the two professions that are expressed, frequently, as emotional contrasts between "them, the educationists" and "them, the anthropologists." It has made, at best, and continues to make, cooperative research difficult. At worst it suggests that a view promised to provide valid research data to inform educational change may suffer the same utility problems of earlier attempts to mesh research to practice.

To some extent this results from the nature of anthropological inquiry which is holistic, situational, descriptive, non-analytic and generally designed to result in a statement of system characteristics rather than of the inevitable association of the elements within the system. Eventually we produce a typology of systems and any generalizations which can inform practice are dependent upon the ability to identify the operational system with one of the model system types. Schoolmen, socialized in schools of education to a

tradition of educational research which was highly analytic and purported to present interrelationships among elements of a system which were conceptually independent of any given situation want statements of law-like regularities from research. Thus when an ethnographic account of the school at Mopass is presented to an urban school principal he cannot (and probably should not) proceed to make operational changes in his school based upon these data. Most educational administrators still regard anthropological studies of schools as insightful empathetic descriptions which they do not trust because they are so understandable and inevitably they send them on to the social studies teacher for classroom use. There are, however, some obvious and immediate operational usages of ethnographic data. Most immediately it has utility for the site it describes and as a basis for comparative research which can produce some generalizations. It is in the latter direction that our own research is now moving.

In the last few years, a group of anthropologists and educators at the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute have been developing applications of field research techniques in a wide variety of settings to educational research and evaluation. Two principles which we have gathered from this experience tend to influence our present work. The first of these holds that social action programs which do not grow out of and reinforce some body of theory do not survive. The second is really a commitment to institutional rather than individual

behavioral modification as the only possible basis for systematic change in the educational system. While these may seem fairly self evident principles, they are not part of the traditions of innovation in education. In education it has usually been assumed that one looks for models in the formal organization of existing institutional structures, within which we are then able to cast a series of roles and so design attendant role behaviors to conform to the functional style which suits the existing model. We then train people for these roles and, if we feel the need for change, we recast the roles or re-arrange them in relation to each other. In searching for these new models, educators have also tended to look at static existing organizational entities rather than at more dynamic behavioral structures which define and enliven the job of educating and being educated. It is our belief that we just might be able to define and design new and better institutional structures and prepare people to work within them if we first took the time to conceptualize the behavioral structure of education and <u>then</u> designed the roles and role behaviors which best facilitates that structure.. From there we could proceed to build the organizational structure which would best house them. Basically, this derives from our notion that no one is really going to build a better mousetrap until someone thinks of a new and better way of catching mice.

The fundamental issue, we think, proceeds from the way in which we have traditionally used the term "institution" in education.

Usage and understanding of the term have been under continual modification in a variety of fields. As used in education, however, the word conjures up the image of a fixed structure as a formal organization capable of being charted, a related set of positional elements which have static and enduring properties in time and space. Not only does the term seem to hold amazing powers of reification in education, it tends to color much of what we think in educational planning. We ask the question, "What will schools be like?" more often than we ask "How shall we educate in the year 2,000?" The task forces which have been set up to look into the educational future are organized largely in terms of existing structural organizational breakdowns within the educational system.

Institutions, even schools, however, are not fixed monolithic structures, nor are they a series of organizational relationships which can be diagrammed and changed by merely drawing new relational charts. Institutions in our usage, are well-established by some and subsequently learned by others seeking to maximize their shared values. What becomes institutionalized in this process is the conversion of human energy and intelligence into a set pattern of behaviors which are productively efficient in maximizing social goals. An institution, then, is a mode of behavior, a structural set of rules of the game which regularize all activities within that institution. To understand and change it, its code must be deciphered, for the process of the transformation of institutions is one of

communication of codes, not of recasting organizational charts. That is to say, if one would wish to build a new institution or transform an existing one, he must look to the conceptualization and codification of new forms of behavior, not for new organizational arrangements.

This year, under a grant from the Ford Foundation, we have begun a long term research program which we hope will both provide the comparative base out of which some preliminary generalizations about the regularities of behavior which characterize the high school will grow, and also to make such generalizations more readily available to educational decision makers. We are beginning this year with three field sites -- high schools and their communities -- which are being concurrently studied by teams of resident anthropologists using the same methodology and constantly comparing their findings. Our basic theoretical assumption is that if schools are social systems, then members of the system should share a common culture and organize their universe and respond to it in ways which are considered culturally appropriate. This implicit code of rules should then be manifested in their behavior since it defines the equation through which the individuals perceive the objective world and so make culturally acceptable decisions about how to behave. Yet, the literature and experience both suggest (1) that within the common culture of the high school, <u>two</u> distinct peer-mediated social systems exist -- one for the adult (teacher, administrator) and one for the child

(student);(2) that the values and behaviors particular to each of these systems are to some extent generation and role bound; (3) that there are in every high school at least two sets of values and norms and so at least two implicit codes of behavior; (4) and that the dissonance between the two is at the heart of the failure of our high schools. Since we are convinced that understanding and eventually improving the dynamics whereby these two social systems are mediated is the key to improving youth education, the central question of our research is:

> What is the optimal social system for the high school, and which cross-age socialization structures best facilitate mediation of adult and student cultures.

We are using a number of techniques -- participant observation, event analysis, network charting, life histories, and the use of students as data gatherers. Our use of these techniques, however, are conditioned by an uneasiness over accepting the notion of two cultures and even more directly by a refusal to focus on either the adult or student world as a point of departure. Thus, while we are compiling complete ethnographic accounts of the three sites we are also experimenting with some other strategies such as observing some incident in the school -- whether critical, periodic, or sustained, tracing the network of adults and students involved in the incident, and then developing in-depth descriptions of how the incident is perceived by and affects the individuals involved. We think that this will give us a means of finding mediation points in action

rather than in organizational or role terms, and will also give us an opportunity to ask about learning and socialization on a transactional rather than adult to child basis. Since our long term interest is in developing an idea-typical description of the high school, consistancy in methodology among the teams is a major concern, but there are others as well.

We are now fourteen months into the program and four months into field work and some interesting problems and notions are beginning to develop. One problem is that if it is true, as research administrators tell us, that in team research the problems and anguish expand at a rate geometrically associated with the number of scientists involved, then the relationship becomes exponential when the scientists are anthropologists. The task of selecting the field sites for the first year of the program is an example of the methodological and operational problems we face. Staff meetings on the selection of criteria for field sites focused on the fact that we are interested in discovering basic patterns of relationships in the high school. Therefore, a good proportion of our discussions at this time centered on whether or not it was possible to describe and select a number of "typical" high school settings in which we could discover "typical" or basic patterns of relationships. We immediately faced the difficulty of defining "typical" as each team member could (and usually did) provide an equally valid (but different) set of characteristics for a typical school. Variables such as socioeconomic characteristics of community, demography, ethnic composition of student and adult populations of school and community, public vs.

private school, and school size were discussed in terms of their relative significance in relation to a description of a typical American high school, or rather high schools. After much debate on necessary sample characteristics, we decided that, for the purposes of our research effort, it was inappropriate to dwell on sample characteristics. The word "typical" was quietly dropped (or at least tabled) as we found that it would be impossible and hopefully unnecessary to construct a typology of three typical high schools according to a large number of gross sociological categories. But, although we determined that we could not and need not search for three "typical" or ideal type schools, we realized that it might be possible and profitable to select three schools which would give us some necessary variety, while avoiding obviously extreme situations, by using a set of rather intuitive criteria for selecting field sites. And so we decided that we would initially avoid culturally extreme situations, such as a high school with a totally American Indian or other ethnic population. We realized, however, that it was equally important to get <u>some</u> variety among the three sites in terms of socioeconomic and ethnic characteristics in order to discover basic patterns which operate in school whether they are homogeneous or heterogeneous in adult and student population. So, we decided that one school site should be ethnically and socioeconomically homogeneous in terms of both student and adult population and at least one site must be ethnically heterogeneous and one socioeconomically

mixed. In addition, a rural, -suburban, -urban continuum framework was decided upon as was an all public high school sample. Having made these decisions, we then posed another problem which is sometimes overlooked -- that is, accessibility of the sites to the research staff. In an ethnographic study of this type, it is, we think, essential for the field workers to live in the community in which the school site is located. In selecting field sites, we have chosen communities in which it was possible for at least one or more members of each team to find places of residence. This provides the field-worker with opportunities to participate in community activities which may be particularly significant in relation to school affairs.

Once the team selected criteria for field sites, we faced the problem of finding schools which fulfilled these criteria and gaining the acceptance of school authorities in the schools selected. Due to the large number of high schools in the New York Metropolitan Area, the task of finding appropriate schools at first seemed both easy -- a large sample from which we most probably would find what we were looking for, -- and difficult -- with such a large sample, where does one begin? This matter, however, did not concern us as much as the difficulties we expected to encounter in gaining entry to the schools. School administrators as a group are notorious for their reluctance to permit outsiders -- be it university researchers, community groups or even parents -- to enter and talk with people in the school. Visitors from the "outside world," a euphemism for

anyone who is not a staff member or student, are often viewed as the enemy, as people who are primarily interested in causing trouble or changing the status quo. This is especially true of urban schools, where, due to real concerns about physical safety and vandalism, police have been hired to guard doors and even corridors.

Expecting such resistance from the schools, we decided that it would be in our best interest to approach the schools with offers to provide professional services, such as teaching courses or training teachers and students as participant observers, in exchange for their serving as field sites. In this way, our presence in the schools could be justified by more than only a promise to provide the school with a copy of our final report -- a theoretical treatise which in the eyes of many administrators would perhaps be of questionable use to the school and probably would collect much dust in the school files.

As it happened, we had relatively little difficulty in gaining entry to the schools. In fact, our first choice of schools in the urban, suburban and rural categories accepted our requests to use these as field sites. In each case, we approached the principal of the high school through an outside contact familiar with the school district and principal. The administrators at each school were impressed by our offer to provide professional services, although, as of now in two out of three cases, they have not yet really taken advantage of this exchange offer. Our offers to use pseudonyms for

all persons and places described in our reports, thus ensuring privacy and anonymity, were however, accepted. Field work is now underway at all three sites.

We are now at the point of developing analytic categories and devising ways of relating them among the sites. This is essential since the primary objective of our current project is to discover basic patterns of relationships in high schools by developing ethnographic studies of three high schools and constantly comparing the data collected among the three schools. While we do not propose this as "instant ethnology," we feel that such continuous comparison of data is a preliminary mode of analysis which can inform comparisons. With the depth and scope of data we are collecting in the ethnographies, however, the problem of comparison takes on an added dimension. That is, how can a tremendous amount of data, collected from three different sites, by three separate teams of fieldworkers, be organized and categorized in order to provide an analytic framework for the comparison of data from different sites? In order to solve this problem, we have found it necessary to develop a common system of data categorization which permits easy access to information contained in the field notes so that instant comparability may be achieved. The need for instant comparisons is prompted by our theoretical and methodological concern for constant comparison and the consequent need for sequential analyses of data during the fieldwork phase of research. In line with these requirements, the system of categorisation we are developing

also provides us with access to each team's preliminary (or low order) analyses of data.

Briefly, the system works as follows: Each field site team is developing a list of native categories which emerge from the fieldnotes. Fieldnotes are indexed according to these categories. Such categories can be events, places, issues, ideas or values, types of people, or actions. These are native categories in that they emerge from informants in the field rather than from abstract classifications created by the fieldworkers. In addition, each team is developing a list of preliminary analytic categories within which the native categories can be classified. This list provides us with some idea of how the researchers are beginning to view the native categories in relationship to each other and which categories seem to be emerging as most significant and therefore need to be examined more carefully. From these two sources, we can generate memos concerning topics which emerge from the comparison of data from the three sites. These memos will serve as the foundation for the eventual theoretical analyses.

The individualistic nature of the interests of the members of the three teams (and within teams) also presented some difficulties in getting a pre-planned system of comparative analysis established but we have found that now that we have data, group meetings among the teams provide the "you know, we have something like that in our school" basis for comparison which is most important to us.

At the end of the first phase of the research program we hope to have (1) complete ethnographic records of all three sites (2) a conceptual framework and set of methods which will allow us (or anyone else interested in expanding the study into new sites)to broaden the conceptual base and (3) a preliminary description of the basic structures that describe the American high school wherever it is found. While we hope that these materials will contribute to the developing knowledge base in the anthropology of education, we hope with equal fervor that it will also have some affect on the organization of learning environments in the high school and on the training of educators.

Robert Redfield used to tell a fable about a hen who was giving a survival lecture to her chicks, precariously balanced on the roof of a chicken coop, while they were being swept downstream by a flash flood. One of the lesson units in her hurried curriculum concerned future sources of food supply, but as she looked at the trees of the forest along the banks of the river, she realized that she remembered very little about forests because she had been away from them so long, and that she wasn't doing too well in telling the chicks about food sources in the forest. So she called out to a wise old owl that she saw in the trees interviewing other wild birds about their reaction to this stress-provoking flood. "Professor Owl," she said, "won't you be my consultant and help me teach my chicks about life in the woods, for you stay there and study it and

are indeed a wise old owl." But the owl had overheard what the hen had been telling the chicks, and he was astonished and appalled at her scientifically inaccurage and superficial information. Besides, he was anxious to proceed with his interviewing and hurry back to his study to speculate on how individuals react when placed suddenly in a new and frightening situation for he was working on a paper on this subject. So he pretended not to hear the hen and went on with his interviewing. Left to her own devices, struggling to maintain order among her chicks, and occasionally having to grasp at one as it fell off the coop into the water, she went on as best she could and described what she thought food sources in the forest would be like. The chicks, as resilient and eager as chicks everywhere, took rather well to it, and later when the coop finally came to rest far, far downstream, the chicks bade farewell to their mother hen and set off bravely to begin their adult lives -- in a treeless meadow.

We see three problems for chickens, owls and humans emerging from the adventures of mother hen and her chicks: (1) How do we go about making sure that the owls and the chickens talk to each other before the flood? (2) How do we take into account in educational planning the fact that the chicks we are preparing for life in the forest may have to face life in a desert? (3) How do we get owls, who know a great deal about forests but not much about chicks, to work with hens, who know all about chicks but can't see the forest for the trees?